

Tech4Africa conference opens in Johannesburg

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12 Aug 2010

The 2010 Tech4Africa conference 'Web and Emerging Technology' kicked off in Bryanston, Johannesburg, yesterday, 12 August 2010 and will run till today, drawing many delegates from various walks of technology business in South Africa and Africa.



The conference, as Tech4Africa founder Gareth Knight put it, is hoping to play a "small role" in igniting the talent and skill of a generation of Africans who understand the reach of a mobile phone, who realise that the global market is accessible to those who build great products, and who challenge the status quo.

Some interesting insights came out of the first panel discussion, which debated the promise of fibre, last mile, wireless and the ubiquitous bandwidth.

Providing as much capacity as possible

Dave Smith of Broadband Infraco said a 4000km of long distance inter-city network has already been developed, which will link SA (homes and businesses). "We have also invested in the international connectivity of SA with the rest of the world," he said, adding that the aim of the project is to provide as much capacity as possible.

But, as SA still ranks among the most expensive countries in the world in terms of broadband technology, the issue of pricing has once again come begging at the conference.

Smith said pricing has come down quite significantly in the past 12 months - a trend he said will engender fierce competition.

Investing in long distance cable

Angela Gahagan, of MTN Business, said although her company has been working together with other role players, each one has also been investing in its long distance cable.

She also said that SA, which she described as lagging in regulation, has nevertheless been working together with Nigeria and Kenya to push the continent forward in this regard.

Peter Uys, of Vodacom, said his company has learned many lessons and is still learning many more in this project.

"When all these projects have been completed, there will be a massive quantity of bandwidth in the market, which will be commoditised," he said.

Africa - lagging in broadband tech

Stafford Massie, of Startups, said the African continent is seriously lagging in broadband technology.

"I want broadband to be given for free to enable people to be connected," Massie said, adding that these new developments come with various challenges.

"First challenge," he said, "is monetisation - the issue of pricing. Second challenge is redundancy."

Three6five Network Solutions' Jeff Fletcher said the government should start looking at the issue of cost reduction at different angles, international and local parameters, among others.

Qualified, enthusiastic staff

But, what is the use of having the best technology in the world if an organisation does not have enough qualified and enthusiastic people to drive it and customise it (put it at the centre of customers)?

Speaking at the conference about 'Circumventing monopolies with Voip and wireless', Justin Pratt, of Internet Solutions, said an organisation needs passionate people armed with technical excellence to change the world.

Usability, customisation and love

"Usability, adapt and love will help you get around in business," Pratt said. "Usability is critically important in business and is at the centre of decisions.

"Customisation of technology is the trend that dominates today's technology business," he explained, adding that it is a powerful tool that is driving a lot of decisions.

Human species that will survive are the ones that will be able to adapt to changes, he said, quoting from Charles Darwin.

"And lastly, he said, you cannot do special stuff without love. This is a journey to show your customers that you really care."

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

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Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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